

Lithuania Seeking To Ease Tensions

Landsbergis Plans 'Gradual' Power Transfer

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 2—Lithuania's president and parliament took steps today that seemed aimed at easing tensions with Moscow over Lithuania's effort to secede from the Soviet Union.

President Vytautas Landsbergis said today that while it is "both legally and morally" impossible to repeal the republic's March 11 declaration of independence, he and the parliament had always intended that such a transfer of power would be "gradual."

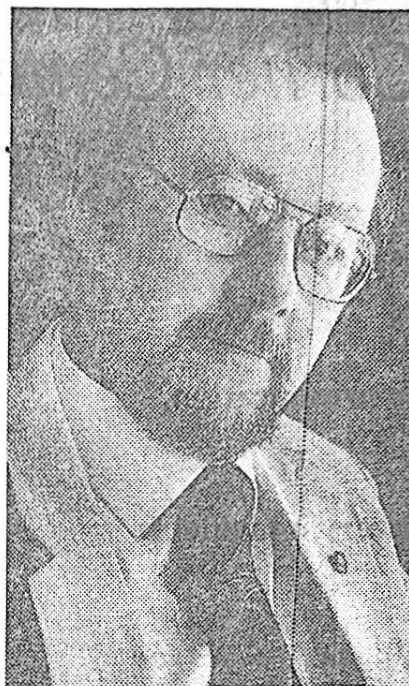
The Lithuanian parliament, meanwhile, sent Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev a conciliatory telegram supporting his reform programs and appealing for negotiations "at any level," though it refused to annul the declaration of independence.

In a harshly worded statement Saturday, Gorbachev had warned Lithuanians that unless they repealed the declaration of independence there would be no negotiations but rather "grave consequences for all of us." Soviet troops are stationed in many Communist Party buildings throughout the republic, including the printing presses.

Speaking of the declaration, Landsbergis told parliament, "It is possible that it may seem to some people that this [declaration] amounted to a demand that power be handed over to us on the very next day. We did not expect this and we did not count on it. We said in our statements what stages we had in mind and how by means of agreements and a gradual takeover of certain functions we would consolidate independence."

The statement by the presidium of Lithuania's parliament was full of language clearly designed to appeal to Gorbachev on both a moral and political level.

"The leadership of [the parliament] would like to assure you that Lithuania by no means intends to harm the Soviet Union and your policy of reforms," it said. "The people of Lithuania watched with delight your expressed adherence to the authority of international law, the United Nations and the idea of a Common European Home."



VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS
... cites "gradual" transfer of power

The statement argued that it was Gorbachev's own denunciation of the crimes of the Stalin era that led them "to the conclusion that the time had come to straighten out one of Stalin's worst international crimes—the annexation of three independent Baltic states" in 1940.

It said that the Lithuanian people had "clearly demonstrated the desire of the Baltic people for a restoration of Baltic independence in a peaceful and democratic manner."

The statement added, "We assure you that the representatives of Lithuania are ready to start the dialogue, negotiations and discussions on any level with the government of the U.S.S.R. or its representatives at your convenience in order to discuss the problem of the legal status of Lithuania in relation to the Soviet constitution and international law."

The Estonian legislature, which has tried to take a more conservative path toward independence than Lithuania, passed a resolution today in Tallinn saying that the republic's representatives in the Supreme Soviet, the standing national parliament, could not participate in the current debate over a new law on mechanisms for secession.

The new secession law is ex-

See LITHUANIA, A14, Col. 1

pected to call for a five-year waiting period after a republic-wide referendum and then give the entire country the right to veto an individual republic's bid to leave the union.

The Estonians said that even to participate in the drafting of such a law would undermine their own drive for independence.

In Moscow, Lithuanian legislator Egidijus Bickauskas tried without success to set up meetings with Kremlin leaders, including Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov. Lithuania sent three more legislators tonight to Moscow in further attempts to establish talks.

Landsbergis has said that while the parliament is not prepared to rescind the declaration of independence, it would discuss such matters as the presence of Soviet troops on Lithuanian territory and Soviet economic interests.

In parliament, some deputies who are members of the independent wing of the Communist Party recommended what they called a more "realistic approach" and suggested they try to use their "established channels" in an attempt to set up a dialogue with Moscow. That discussion will continue Tuesday.

The parliament's statement said that Moscow's military pressure on the republic was increasing.

Some legislators said they have become especially anxious since foreign reporters were told to leave Lithuania last week, forcing the journalists to rely primarily on information obtained by telephone.

In Washington, the State Department criticized Moscow's decision to expel Western journalists.

Landsbergis also told the session that he had accepted a proposal by Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel to hold possible future negotiations with Moscow in Prague.